

Message Text

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 01 BANGKO 10587 01 OF 02 280546Z

12

ACTION EA-14

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 NSAE-00 NSCE-00 SSO-00 USIE-00

INRE-00 PM-07 H-03 INR-10 L-03 NSC-07 PA-04 RSC-01

PRS-01 SP-03 SS-20 TRSE-00 OMB-01 AGR-20 SWF-02 SIL-01

LAB-06 DRC-01 AID-20 EB-11 COME-00 /136 W

----- 065305

O R 280459Z JUN 74

FM AMEMBASSY BANGKOK

TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 4623

INFO AMCONSUL CHIANG MAI

AMCONSUL UDORN

CINCPAC

DIA

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 BANGKOK 10587

CINCPAC FOR POLAD

E. O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PGOV, PINT, EAGR, TH

SUBJ: AGITATION OVER LAND REFORM

REF : A. STATE 136631; B. BANGKOK 10449; C. BANGKOK 10366;

D. FBIS D260316Z JUNE 74

1. SUMMARY. SMALL BUT GROWING NUMBERS OF FARMERS HAVE BEEN DEMONSTRATING IN BANGKOK OVER PAST WEEK TO DEMAND SPEEDY GOVERNMENT ACTION TO RESTORE THEIR RIGHT TO TILL IF NOT TO OWN THE FARMS THEY HAVE LOST, ALLEGEDLY TO UNSCRUPULOUS MONEY LENDERS AND OTHERS. TENANCY PROBLEM IS CENTERED IN RICH RICE PRODUCING AREA OF CENTRAL PLAINS. IMMEDIATE CAUSE IS BELIEVED TO BE LOW RICE PRICES FROM 1970 CULMINATING IN ADDED BURDEN OF POOR CROP IN 1972.

2. NOT LIKELY THAT DEMONSTRATORS WILL BE ABLE TO ATTRACT SUFFICIENT SUPPORT TO THREATEN GOVERNMENT STABILITY.

CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 02 BANGKO 10587 01 OF 02 280546Z

MASS OF FARMERS ARE BUSILY PLANTING RICE CROP THAT

PROMISES BEST FARM PRICE FOR YEARS. MOREOVER, SANYA GOVERNMENT IS SINCRELY ATTEMPTING TO IMPROVE LOT OF DEMONSTRATORS AND OTHER FARMERS AS WELL.

3. BEGIN LIMITED OFFICIAL USE. AS REPORTED IN REFS B AND C, THE BANGKOK PRESS HAS GIVEN FRONT PAGE COVERAGE OVER THE PAST FEW DAYS TO ANOTHER DEMONSTRATION IN BANGKOK BY FARMERS FROM THE CENTRAL PLAINS PROVINCES. THESE DEMONSTRATORS SEEK TO PRESSURE THE SANYA GOVERNMENT INTO HELPING THEM RECOVER LANDS ALLEGEDLY LOST TO UNSCRUPULOUS LOAN SHARKS AND LANDLORDS. SIMILAR COMPLAINTS WERE VOICED AT FARMER DEMONSTRATIONS LAST MARCH AND MAY. FARMER GRIEVANCES HAVE BEEN PRESENTED TO GOVERNMENT AS SIX DEMANDS, MAIN THRUST OF WHICH IS THAT THE GOVERNMENT SPEED UP VARIOUS MEASURES ALREADY ANNOUNCED TO AID LANDLESS FARMERS.

4. THIS ACTION BY FARM GROUPS HAS RECEIVED SUPPORT FROM THE NATIONAL STUDENT CENTER OF THAILAND (NSCT) WHICH BECAME ACQUAINTED WITH, AND GAVE PUBLICITY TO, FARM GRIEVANCES OVER LAND OWNERSHIP AS A RESULT OF ITS DEMOCRACY TEACHING PROGRAM IN RURAL AREAS LAST APRIL (SEE BANGKOK 4336 AND FTB 19,606). THE SECOND SANYA CABINET'S PUBLIC STATEMENTS THAT IT REGARDS LAND REFORM AS PRIORITY ISSUE ALONG WITH INFLATION, IS VERY LIKELY ANOTHER SOURCE OF ENCOURAGEMENT TO THE DISPOSSESSED FARMERS. THE PRIME MINISTER ALSO HAS PUBLICLY EXPRESSED SYMPATHY FOR THE FARMERS. DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER PRAKOP HUTASING HAS TRAVELLED TO THE AFFECTED PROVINCES, AND MET PERSONALLY WITH FARM GROUPS TO HEAR THEIR GRIEVANCES AND TO EXPLAIN GOVERNMENT LAND REFORM POLICIES. HE MET WITH REPRESENTATIVES OF THE BANGKOK DEMONSTRATORS FOR SEVERAL HOURS ON JUNE 27, ACCORDING TO PRESS ACCOUNTS.

5. PRAKOP ANNOUNCED TO DEMONSTRATING FARMERS ON JUNE 25, AFTER TUESDAY'S SCHEDULED CABINET MEETING, THE FOLLOWING RELIEF MEASURES: (A) GOVERNMENT WILL PURCHASE LAND FROM LARGE LAND OWNERS AND SELL THEM TO NEEDY FARMERS ON INSTALLMENT PLAN; (B) GOVERNMENT WILL ACT FROM JUNE 25 TO APPROPRIATE LANDS FOR DESTITUTE FARMERS OR DIVERT GRAZING LAND FOR THE SAME PURPOSE, SUBJECT TO THE REQUIREMENT THAT SUCH LAND BE WORKED THROUGH SETTLEMENTS OR COOPERATIVES; CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 03 BANGKO 10587 01 OF 02 280546Z

(C) NATIONAL FOREST RESERVES THAT ARE NO LONGER PRODUCTIVE IN TIMBER WILL BE OPENED FOR CULTIVATION BY NEEDY FARMERS; (D) LOANS WILL BE MADE AVAILABLE FROM A SPECIAL 35 MILLION BAHT "FUND TO SECURE RIGHTS FOR FARMERS" (REF D).

6. SANYA GOVERNMENT HAS TAKEN OTHER CONCRETE STEPS TO DEAL WITH THE PROBLEM. FIRST WAS THE INVOCATION OF THE ARBITRARY POWERS PERMITTED UNDER ARTICLE 17 OF THE 1972 INTERIM

CONSTITUTION DESPITE ARTICLE 17'S HISTORICAL LINK WITH THE PREVIOUS MILITARY REGIME WHICH USED IT AGAINST OPPONENTS OF THE REGIME AS WELL AS IN PARTICULARLY SERIOUS CRIMINAL CASES. BY ORDER OF PRIME MINISTER ON JUNE 4, EIGHT COMMITTEES WERE FORMED TO HELP "HONEST FARMERS TO CULTIVATE" A 1974 RICE CROP. MEMBERSHIP CONSISTED OF GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS AND ONE STUDENT ON EACH COMMITTEE FROM NATIONAL STUDENT CENTER OF THAILAND. THE ARTICLE 17 POWER WAS ALSO EXERCISED TO GIVE SOME DISPOSSESSED FARMERS THE RIGHT TO TILL THEIR PREVIOUSLY HELD LANDS DURING THE 1974. SEASON.

7. THE DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER HAS BEEN APPOINTED TO HEAD A SPECIAL COMMITTEE TO COORDINATE AND ASSIST THE WORK OF THE EIGHT OTHER PREVIOUSLY APPOINTED GOVERNMENT ARBITRATION COMMITTEES CHARGED WITH RESOLVING LAND TENURE DISPUTES. HOWEVER, REPRESENTATIVES OF THE NSCT HAVE WITHDRAWN FROM SIX OF THE ARBITRATION COMMITTEES OVER DISSATISFACTION WITH THE GOVERNMENT'S RESPONSE. THE DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER HAS URGED STUDENTS TO RESUME THEIR PARTICIPATION.

8. SECOND SANYA GOVERNMENT ALSO HAS APPOINTED A HIGH LEVEL COMMITTEE FOR LAND REFORM FOR THE FARMERS. MINISTRY OF AGRICULTURE AND COOPERATIVES HAS WORKED WITH MINISTRY OF INTERIOR TO PREPARE A DRAFT LAND REFORM BILL THAT WILL BE SENT TO THE NATIONAL LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY FOR APPROVAL. ALSO UNDER CONSIDERATION IS A REQUIREMENT THAT LANDLORDS MAY NOT CHANGE THE CONDITIONS OF THE LEASE FOR A MINIMUM OF SIX YEARS. OTHER REPORTED PROVISIONS ARE THE UNIFICATION OF THE SEPARATE DEPARTMENTS FOR LAND DEVELOPMENT AND FOR COOPERATIVES IN THE MINISTRY OF AGRICULTURE WITH THE LAND DEPARTMENT AND THE LAND SETTLEMENT DIVISION IN THE MINISTRY OF INTERIOR. THIS NEW UNIT WOULD THEN BE FORMED INTO A SEMI-AUTONOMOUS BUREAU OF LAND REFORM IN THE MINISTRY OF

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 04 BANGKO 10587 01 OF 02 280546Z

AGRICULTURE AND COOPERATIVES. IT WOULD HAVE THE AUTHORITY TO RESETTLE LANDLESS FARMERS ON NATIONAL FOREST AREAS THAT HAVE BEEN DENUDED BY SQUATTERS AND OTHER INDIVIDUALS ACTING ILLEGALLY. OTHER OBJECTIVES WOULD BE TO IMPROVE LAND UTILIZATION AND MANAGEMENT PLUS, HOPEFULLY, SPEEDING THE COMPLETION OF A CADASTRAL SURVEY.

CONFIDENTIAL

NNN

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 01 BANGKO 10587 02 OF 02 280605Z

12

ACTION EA-14

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 NSAE-00 NSCE-00 SSO-00 USIE-00

INRE-00 PM-07 H-03 INR-10 L-03 NSC-07 PA-04 RSC-01

PRS-01 SP-03 SS-20 AID-20 EB-11 COME-00 TRSE-00 OMB-01

AGR-20 SWF-02 SIL-01 LAB-06 DRC-01 /136 W

----- 065574

O R 280459Z JUN 74

FM AMEMBASSY BANGKOK

TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 4624

INFO AMCONSUL CHIANG MAI

AMCONSUL UDORN

CINCPAC

DIA

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 2 OF 2 BANGKOK 10587

CINCPAC FOR POLAD

9. COMMENT. IN PARTIAL RESPONSE TO REF A, AT THE TIME OF WRITING A-72, FEB 17, 1971, LAND OWNERSHIP WAS NOT A SERIOUS PROBLEM. THE CENTRAL PLAINS REGION, THE RICE BASKET OF THE COUNTRY, HAD A HIGHER LEVEL OF TENANCY THAN OTHER, LESS PRODUCTIVE AREAS OF THE COUNTRY. THE RELATIVELY POOR NORTHEAST, FOR EXAMPLE, HAS A WIDELY DIFFUSED LAND OWNERSHIP PATTERN.

10. BEGINNING IN 1970, BUT NOT YET REGISTERED IN THE STATISTICS USED FOR THE 1971 REPORT, FARMERS IN THE RICE RICH CENTRAL PLAINS REGION BEGAN LOSING POSSESSION OF THEIR LAND AT AN INCREASING RATE. THE REASON WAS THE VERY LOW DOMESTIC PRICE FOR RICE THAT CONTINUED THROUGH 1971 AND INTO 1972. THIS TREND WAS ACCENTUATED IN 1972 WHEN RICE PRODUCTION DROPPED 20 PERCENT DUE TO DROUGHT THAT BROUGHT COMPLETE CROP FAILURES TO MANY FARMERS. A FIGURE OF ROUGHLY 20,000 "VICTIMIZED" FARMERS HAS APPEARED IN THE PRESS, THE ORIGIN OF WHICH IS APPARENTLY A REPORTED STATE-CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 02 BANGKO 10587 02 OF 02 280605Z

MENT BY SANYA IN MAY THAT "19,999 FAMILIES, MOSTLY IN THE CENTRAL REGION," HAD BECOME VICTIMS OF LOAN SHARKS. END LIMITED OFFICIAL USE.

11. ALSO RESPONSIBLE FOR BRINGING THE PROBLEM TO THE FORE HAS BEEN THE INCREASINGLY SUCCESSFUL USE OF AGITATION POLITICS THAT HAS FOLLOWED THE OVERTURN OF OCTOBER. GOVERNMENT DECISION MAKING IS HIGHLY CENTRALIZED IN BANGKOK AND POPULAR GRIEVANCES TEND TO REACH THAT LEVEL BEFORE THEY ARE RESOLVED, USUALLY BY CABINET RATHER THAN BY MINISTRY ACTION. IN THIS RESPECT, THE EVOLUTION OF THE CURRENT AGITATION OVER LAND OWNERSHIP IS PARALLELING THAT FOR THE RECENT TEXTILE STRIKE. THE PRIME MINISTER AGAIN HAS BECOME PERSONALLY INVOLVED DESPITE GIVING RESPONSIBILITY TO RESOLVE THE ISSUE TO THE DEPUTY MINISTER.

12. IN CONTRAST TO THE TEXTILE ISSUE, HOWEVER, THE SAME NUMBERS IN CLOSE PROXIMITY TO BANGKOK ARE NOT INVOLVED AND CONSEQUENTLY MASS MOBILIZATION IS MORE DIFFICULT. MOREOVER, NOT ALL FARMERS ARE EQUALLY AFFECTED. THE FARM PRICE OUTLOOK FOR THE NEW CROP NOW BEING PLANTED IS BETTER THAN LAST YEAR. FARMERS WITH LAND ARE STILL THE VAST MAJORITY AND THEIR CURRENT OUTLOOK IS OPTIMISTIC. CONSEQUENTLY, EMBASSY'S ASSESSMENT CONTINUES TO BE THAT THIS DEMONSTRATION WILL NOT ESCALATE TO THE POINT WHERE GOVERNMENT STABILITY IS THREATENED. MOREOVER, A NUMBER OF CONCRETE MEASURES TO AID THE FARMERS ARE BEING IMPLEMENTED, EVEN IF NOT AT THE PACE DEMANDED BY THE DEMONSTRATORS AND SOME STUDENTS.

13. MORE BASIC ANALYTICAL AIRGRAM ON FARM TENANCY PROBLEM, WHICH HAS BEEN LONG DELAYED BY SEVER PERSONNEL SHORTAGES, WILL BE COMPLETED AND FORWARDED ASAP IN RESPONSE TO REF A. KINTNER

CONFIDENTIAL

NNN

Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01 JAN 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: GOVERNMENT REFORM, PUBLIC DEMONSTRATIONS, RICE, POLITICAL SITUATION, LABOR STRIKES, AGRICULTURAL WORKERS, LAND TENURE, RURAL AREAS, LAND REFORMS, P RICES
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 28 JUN 1974
Decaption Date: 01 JAN 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Authority: BoyleJA
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 28 MAY 2004
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1974BANGKO10587
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: GS
Errors: N/A
Film Number: D740171-0350
From: BANGKOK
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1974/newtext/t1974066/aaaaaeim.tel
Line Count: 253
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Office: ACTION EA
Original Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 5
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: A. STATE 136631; B. BANGKOK 10449; C. , BANGKOK 10366;
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Authority: BoyleJA
Review Comment: n/a
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 12 AUG 2002
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review History: RELEASED <12-Aug-2002 by kelleyw0>; APPROVED <24 MAR 2003 by BoyleJA>
Review Markings:

Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
30 JUN 2005

Review Media Identifier:
Review Referrals: n/a
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: AGITATION OVER LAND REFORM
TAGS: PGOV, PINT, EAGR, TH
To: STATE
Type: TE
Markings: Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 30 JUN 2005